

Board of Regents Speech

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By

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I am here on behalf of the Faculty Senate at UNO. I have been a professor for 25 years in the College of Education, and as you might expect, I have great affection for the university. Because I have been there so long, I believe I can speak for the many citizens of metropolitan Omaha who depend on UNO for inspiration and education. We are all your constituents. We are grateful for your leadership and for policy decisions which have contributed to UNO being the fine educational institution that it is. Students who graduate from UNO serve the entire state of Nebraska. That is a big payback for all the work you, as regents, do.

I come to evaluate one proposed policy decision which will not be favorable to UNO nor to the people UNO serves—one which will be inequitable, will be counterproductive, and will possibly be destructive to the mission of UNO. First, I will briefly explain the negative consequences likely from the proposed merger of the PKI Department of Computer and Electronics Engineering (CEEN) with the Electrical Engineering Department at UNL. My second point has to do with respect for the unity of our fine university in Omaha.

Point number one: We believe that the Engineering department at UNO has been hampered in the recent past by administrators who wish to occupy our campus to collect its students and prestige, plus deny it the resources and equitable treatment it deserves and needs for continued growth. The problems will be worse with the merger and the nearly 800 engineering students will not be served better.

The UNO Faculty Senate members have passed resolutions this academic year recommending that the PKI Engineering program should be left intact and should be funded so that it can expand to become a freestanding college. This is the same belief imbedded in the Langenberg Report. The report, paid for by the Board of Regents (BOR), concluded: The "...state of Nebraska and University of Nebraska system should initiate a deliberate and carefully planned process leading to the establishment of an independent college of engineering at the University of Nebraska at Omaha." This same recommendation has recently been echoed by former UN Chancellors Weber and Roskens in an OWH editorial in March of 2013. Drs. Weber and Roskens also assert that, "Of the largest 50 cities in this country, Omaha stands alone without an independent College of Engineering." A merger will interfere with this important goal.

That brings me to my second point, equity and respect for UNO. It will serve no useful purpose for me to dance around the edges of this issue. UNO is a vibrant, effective educational entity and we believe the regents should protect it, not promote or authorize predation. UNO is not asking for special treatment, just fair treatment.

There is much more I could say but the simple truths have already been expressed and now is the time to call for action. My colleagues and I come to you requesting your support for the unity that is UNO. It should not be partitioned and handed out piece by piece to other parts of the system. We are asking you to respect the powerful mission that you and regents before you made possible—the power of a genuine, metropolitan university which has the mission of serving the community in which it resides with high quality educational opportunities. So, we respectfully ask that you, as a Board of Regents, protect all of UNO and save the PKI department of engineering from a merger. Furthermore, we urge you to authorize planning and funding for a free standing College of Engineering at UNO.